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AUTHOR Bogarth, J. D.
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ABSTRACT

Three major interpersonal dimensions related to client outcome in counseling are discussed in terms of their effectiveness in dormitory counseling. These are: (1) empathy; (2) warmth; and (3) genuineness. All were considered validly measurable. A pilot training project, which focused only on empathy, is described. The results suggest a significant difference between pre- and post-scores in the levels of empathy for both an experimental and a control group. A followup project paired 66 college dorm counselors randomly to deal with specified problems common to their area and had them role play the different problems. They were grouped as follows: (1) those who received competent first-hand training focusing on empathy; (2) those who observed the training sessions via video tape; and (3) those who went through a project which included case review and discussion. No significant differences were found between the groups in improvement in empathy, warmth, or genuineness. In other words, the findings did not corroborate those of the first study. Reasons for this inconsistency are suggested. (TL)

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New Methods of Appropriate Training of Dormitory Counselors

J. D. Bozarth

I would like to briefly review several of the dimensions found to be related to client outcome in counseling and psychotherapy; describe a training program of limited time which might improve one of these dimensions; and review a couple of studies which we have on the effectiveness of a training model. The specific questions which I will touch upon are:

1) What are some of the major interpersonal dimensions which ought to prove effective in dormitory counseling from past research in other areas?
2) What kind of training program can improve these dimensions?
3) Is the training approach parsimonious?
4) Is the training approach more effective than other training approaches?
5) Is the training approach effective in increasing the dimensions for these counselors?
6) What is the relationship of certain of the dimensions to certain outcome criteria?

What are some of the major interpersonal dimensions which ought to prove effective in dormitory counseling from past research in other areas? The extensive body of research relating counselor or therapist conditions of empathy, positive regard or warmth, and genuineness to client outcome has led to some initial extensions to training. For example, Carkhuff and Truax (1968) have found that both lay

CG 005 420

personnel and graduate students after approximately 100 hours of training could function at levels of interpersonal functioning commensurate to experienced professsionals. Lay personnel provided with training in these dimensions were also observed to be associated with more constructive behavioral change in therapy patients when compared to a control group of patients seen by professional counselors. More specifically, Berenson, Carkhuff, and Myrus (1966) found that a trained group of volunteer college students with 16 hours training consistently demonstrated the greatest amount of change when compared with a quasi-therapeutic experience group and a group which received no training experience. In short, the experimental group in that study received eight weeks of training for 16 hours and found significant improvements in interpersonal functioning. This included over-all difference scores on a combination of the empathy, warmth, genuineness, and a concreteness measure; also significant differences between the three groups on self-perceptions, roommate perceptions, and interview reports. There was not, however, significant differences on the particular measures in that study; e.g., the empathy, warmth, and genuineness measures.

It was our thinking that a shorter period of training might provide change; especially, in the condition of empathy if special focus was placed upon that dimension. All three of the dimensions can be measured from scales which have received extensive validation from a variety of counseling settings and varying populations. These can be briefly defined as follows:

1) Empathy: On a 10-point scale, using the lowest level, for example, "...the first person appears completely unaware or ignorant of even the most conspicuous surface feelings of the other person..." At the highest level, the first person "...almost always responds with accurate empathic understanding to all of the other person's deeper feelings as well as surface feelings..."

2) Positive Regard: This is a five point-scale running from the lowest level where "...the first person is communicating clear negative regard for the second person..." to stage five where the first person "...communicates a very deep respect for the second person..."

3) Genuineness: This scale runs from the level one where "...the first person's liberalizations are clearly unrelated to what he is feeling at the moment, or his only genuine repsonses are negative to what he is feeling as regards the second person... and he does not employ his reaction as a basis for potentially valuable inquiry into the relationship..." to level five where the first person "...is freely and deeply himself in a non-explorative relationship... and in the event of hurtful responses (his) comments are employed constructively to open further area of inquiry for both...persons." (Berenson, Carkhuff, and Myrus, 1966)

Concerning question 2: What kind of training program can improve these dimensions?

Considering this background and utilizing the operational definitions of these dimensions, it was decided to run a pilot training project focused on one dimension - that of empathy. If this initial run suggested any possibilities at all that such training

would be successful, a further more elaborate project would be undertaken with dormitory college counselors. We reasoned that empathy levels could be at least minimally increased at lower levels by obtaining a knowledge of the levels of the scales. We then selected - using all of the format of necessary research design in selection and so forth - a group to receive training in empathy and to be compared with a matched control group of dormitory college counselors from one university. The training in the pilot project included only six hours of training on the dimension of empathy. The training consisted of three phases of, First, didactic review of the empathy research scales within a discussion setting, Second, the listening of high-empathy counseling tapes within the setting of open discussion, and Third, role playing of common dormitory counselor problems while other members rated them on the empathy scale. Again, all phases of the training were within the context of open discussion and of, hopefully, high levels of empathy, warmth, and genuineness on the part of two doctoral staff trainers who acted as co-leaders in the group meetings. All of the participants in both control and experimental groups were people who had a minimum of one year experience as a dormitory college counselor. The results of this pilot project were really rather amazing. The initial ratings of all the dormitory counselors were, incidentally similar to the Berenson, Carkhuff, and Myrus (1966) study in that the initial ratings were below two. The results suggested: 1) a statistically significant difference between pre- and post-scores in the levels of empathy for both the experimental and control group. The increase being from 1.6 to 3.9 for the experimental group and from 1.75 to 2.5 for the control group;

2) a statistically significant difference on the post scores (and no difference on the pre) for the experimental than for the control group; and 3) a statistically significant relationship of the empathy scores to the counseling effectiveness as measured by student perceptions on the Duncan Counselor Effectiveness Scale (1967). This occurred after only six hours of empathy training. In addition, the conditions of positive regard and genuineness changed although it was not significantly different on the pre and post measures on the experimental group. The change being 1. 9 on the pre score and 2. 6 on the post score for the experimental group. The control group of subjects actually had scores which went down on the post training (but not significantly) from a 2. 0 on the pre rating to 1. 8 on the post rating. The genuineness dimension could not be measured due to low inter-rater reliability. Other inter-rater reliabilities were around . 60 for both the empathy and warmth scales.

Most would agree in relation to the third question, "Is the training approach parsimonious?", that the training program is certainly a parsimonious one.

Our second project as a follow up to the one described entailed a slightly different procedure. It also took into consideration the fourth question, Is the training approach more effective than other training approaches? On the first project, the ratings were obtained by objective ratings of counselor performance with a trained actor or actress. Our second project paired people randomly to deal with specified problems common in college dormitory counselor area and had each of them role play the different problems. The roles to be played, matching etc. were considered in the research design. Also, the second project included a total of 66 college dormitory counselors. In contrast to the first study where all

counselors had one year experience, approximately 50% of the counselors in this study were new counselors with no experience as dormitory counselors. These counselors were randomly grouped into three groups: 1) a group receiving training on the dimensions with a special focus on empathy. This training was given to them by two individuals who have had a great deal of experience working with groups in this way and who altered the usual training procedure of considering empathy, warmth, and genuineness by instead, focusing upon the empathy training. Each individual - in this project - had a separate group rather than acting as co-training leaders; 2) the second group was the matched group which observed via video tape the training sessions on empathy; and 3) the control group again matched by subjects went through a project which included case review and discussion.

The results of that project can be presented simply: This time there were no significant differences between the groups in improvement on the empathy, warmth, and genuineness dimensions. Neither were the empathy scores related to performance as perceived by students on the Duncan Counselor Effectiveness Scale. The interpretation of these differing results obviously is more difficult. Considering the questions: What kind of training program can improve these dimensions? Is the training approach more effective than other training approaches? Is the training approach effective in increasing the dimensions for these counselors? and What is the relationship of certain of the dimensions to certain outcome criteria?

The null hypotheses of no difference could not be rejected.

In short, our first study suggested that short-term training in empathy of the type described could increase especially low levels of empathy to minimally

effective levels in just six hours. The second, more extensive study did not suggest this possibility. Also, the first study suggested that increase in empathy scores were related to counseling effectiveness as perceived by students while the second study did not suggest this possibility.

Both of the studies did suggest that, similar to the Berenson, Carkhuff, and Myrus (1966) study that the empathy ratings and warmth and genuineness ratings as well are especially low when college dormitory counselors are cast in the role of being a therapeutic helper.

Since the second study did not confirm the findings of the first, we are in somewhat of a dilemma to speculate upon some of the possible reasons for the inconsistency of results. Among some of these reasons are:

1) That the statistically significant differences found in the first study occurred simply by chance.

2) That the methods of utilizing thespians in evaluating dormitory counselors on these dimensions are considerably different than utilizing role playing by peers. The utilization of the thespians could be logically assumed to be a better representation of reality than could the role playing technique. However, although intuitively and logically suggested, this would need to be empirically determined.

3) The presence in the second group of college dormitory counselors who had no experience versus the minimum experience of one year in the first group may have also been a variable influencing the results. That is, experience of one year as a dormitory counselor <u>might</u> be one prerequisite before such minimum training

could elevate empathy scores. Those who have not had such experience may be so anxious and/or naive about the oncoming job that they are not very open to such change.

4) There is the question of the effectiveness of the training approach and/or the effectiveness of the trainers. The first group entailed co-leaders trained in counseling and psychotherapy while the other group had only one leader and was composed of leaders who had done much training in the dimensions but were not especially trained in counseling or psychotherapeutic endeavors.

Even though the results of the second study were not statistically significant the trend of the pre- and post-tests means for the empathy training was a positive change for both the direct and the vicarious groups of nearly the same proportions. The control group from pre- to post-testing decreased on the average empathy score. The collapsed treatment groups of directive and vicarious, however, was also not significantly different at the .05 level between the control group. It would have reached significance at the .06 level suggesting intuitively that talk about and focus upon empathy tends to increase empathy scores while focus on other variables may tend to decrease such scores. Again, this is intuitively based and based on only empirical evidence from other areas and not a result of our latter study.

It is overall suggested that empathy training for college dormitory counselors utilizing a combination of didactic, role examination, and role and discussion participating in a period of six hours is still up for grabs as a means whereby to increase the interpersonal performance of college dormitory counselors. In addition, there is the question whether or not such training is even appropriate.

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